United Nations

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses hope that initiatives announced by South African President at opening of Parliament will advance further removal of main pillars of apartheid.

- Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) reports several hundred people killed by earthquake which struck Afghanistan and Pakistan Friday morning.

- Secretary-General expresses deep concern about attack on health centre in Angola.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said today through his Spokesman that the address of President De Klerk at the opening of the South African Parliament on Friday advanced further the process of removing statutory apartheid from the country's institutional framework.

He expressed hope that the "constructive initiatives" would be accompanied by measures giving substantive effect to the removal of the main pillars of apartheid and by the resolution of a number of outstanding issues required for the commencement of negotiations. Mr. Perez de Cuellar said he was heartened to see that those and other initiatives of South African leaders were providing an impetus to the process of eradicating apartheid and the establishment of a non-racial and democratic society in the country as envisaged by the United Nations.

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Several hundred people have been killed by an earthquake which struck Afghanistan and Pakistan on the morning of 1 February, according to a report released today by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) in Geneva.

The Agency reported that, with respect to Afghanistan, the earthquake had affected 18 provinces, but that damage assessment was made difficult by the

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affected area's remoteness. Government authorities, UNDRO said, feared that hundreds were killed, in addition to heavy damage inflicted to buildings and livestock. The severe winter weather created a major problem of accommodations for the victims, and the Afghan Government had requested UNDRO to launch an appeal for international assistance, the Agency said.

With respect to Pakistan, UNDRO said the UNDRO/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) resident representative had reported 181 killed, 502 injured and extensive damage to buildings and livestock. It said emergency relief was made difficult by heavy snowfall. The Pakistani Government was preparing a request for emergency assistance and would report on the situation as it received information from its search and rescue teams.

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A United Nations official told correspondents today that the Secretary-General had been deeply concerned to learn of an attack on a health centre operated by Médecins Sans Frontières (Belgium and Spain) near Kuito, Bie Province, in Angola, in which one person was killed and several were injured.

The official said the Secretary-General appealed to all parties involved to use their good offices to guarantee the security of personnel involved in providing the humanitarian assistance that was essential for the survival of large numbers of the affected population in Angola.

Médecins Sans Frontières is one of the non-governmental organizations which has signed a letter of association with the United Nations as part of the Special Relief Programme for Angola.

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In another development, the United Nations official told correspondents that the Secretary-General was asked by correspondents this morning, upon entering the building, to comment on the proposal made by Iranian President Rafsanjani to mediate in the Persian Gulf conflict.

The Secretary-General said in reply that he "welcomed such an initiative" and that he, as Secretary-General, was "enormously concerned" about the loss of life and the material damages. He went on to say that he thought Iran was in a good position to produce a formula which could put an end to the present situation. "Something has to be done in order to stop the war", he stated.

Asked about the possibility of sending United Nations staff into Iraq on a humanitarian mission, Mr. Perez de Cuellar replied that he was scheduled to have a meeting with Executive Director Grant of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) this afternoon. Mr. Grant was currently in Geneva, the Secretary-General said, to see how the United Nations system could relieve the present situation on all sides -- mainly with medicine and food for children.

The official said the Secretary-General planned to hold another meeting with Mr. Grant next week, with heads of Agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO).

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